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**THE NEW CHALLENGE TO OPERATIONAL READINESS:
The Threat of Extremist and Supremacist Groups to the United States Military**

by
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This paper is submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

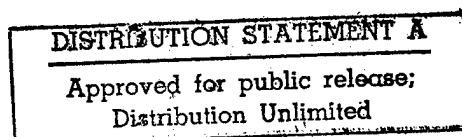
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ABSTRACT

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Title: The New Challenge To Operational Readiness: The Threat of Extremist and Supremacist Groups to the United States Military.

Date: 15 May 1997

Operational Commanders will face a new and growing challenge to readiness as military units emerge with members who belong to extremist and supremacist groups. An Army Task Force Study determined that approximately 7% of military members participate in some form in extremist or supremacist groups. Identification and neutralization of these individuals will be one challenge to the leadership of the military services. The second challenge is in recognition by the National Command Authority of the existence of extremist groups and their open conviction that impending conflict with the Federal government is imminent. The Secretary of Defense must charge the Joint Staff to develop a Deliberate Action Plan to serve as a starting point for Crisis Action Planning to effectively deal with this challenge and remain operationally ready to thwart this potential domestic threat.

THE NEW CHALLENGE TO OPERATIONAL READINESS:

The threat of extremist and supremacist groups to the United States Military.

On April 12, 1997, Air Force Captain Craig Button left a training exercise on the Arizona-New Mexico border, flew what appeared to be 800 miles northeast and then disappeared. For three weeks, an embarrassed Air Force could not account for their \$9 million aircraft or for the pilot's actions. Wild speculation abounded as to what happened to Button, fueling incredible theories of conspiracy, theft, suicide and terrorism. The Internet carried bizarre stories running the gamut from a rogue pilot in a copycat Hollywood thriller "hijacking" a bomb-laden jet to a disenchanted military pilot connected to the "patriot" militias.¹

Just how incredible are these theories? Is a military connection to a paramilitary or militia group that far off? Obviously the Air Force leadership took these theories seriously enough to conduct surveillance of nearly 150 small airfields within a 75 mile path along the aircraft's flight plan. And despite installing concrete barriers at the North American Aerospace Defense Command inside Cheyenne Mountain, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, assured a jittery public at a news conference that we as a nation were in no danger. Speculators in Denver put the A-10 on a flight path to bomb the site of the Timothy McVeigh trial on the twin anniversary weekend of the siege at Waco and the Oklahoma Federal building bombing.²

Is it possible that a model Air Force pilot could steal a sophisticated jet aircraft, fly it into an underground or mountain hangar and operate as part of an extremist group intent on targeting the federal government? Could this happen without beforehand

knowledge, unsuspected by co-workers and commanders? Moreover, are we prepared for it? The answer is yes.....and no.

Shortly after the Fayetteville homicides in December 1995, where three soldiers from Fort Bragg allegedly murdered two African-American civilians in what appeared to be a skinhead-related group initiation, the Secretary of the Army commissioned a task force to determine the scope and impact of extremist activities within the ranks. The focus of the study centered on how the human relations environment and Army leadership impact extremism and to determine effective means of dealing with this problem.³ Based on study numbers alone, of over 17,000 soldiers surveyed from 28 installations (7,638 of whom were personally interviewed), 11.6% claimed to know a soldier who held extremist views, 7.1% reported knowing a fellow soldier who was a member of an extremist group, and over 17% admitted to having had access to some form of extremist or supremacist literature.⁴

Carry these numbers across the board throughout the services and we see a substantial number of military members either interested or involved in some form of extremist or supremacist activities. Seven percent of the enlisted population of this country's military equates to roughly 87,000 (based on enlisted strength of about 1,250,000). Factor in how many reservists and national guard members may be affiliated with extremist or supremacist groups and we are looking at an equivalent force of some of our allies, or enemies.

Suppose you had a platoon or squadron or ship with 6 or 7 soldiers or sailors or marines who affiliated with an extremist group or adhered to the principles of a

supremacist organization. Could you count on their allegiance to the United States military mission if it was counter to the group's agenda? When our young folks raise their right hands and swear to protect and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign *and domestic*, are we forcing them to choose which battles they will fight and can we count on them to make the right choices?

In a research project completed last year, LTCOL Sir Walter Scott, Jr. outlined several reasons individuals had for joining extremist and supremacist groups:

- militia groups have been successful at channeling fear toward federal officials, law enforcement officers, minority groups, pro-choice providers, environmentalists, conservationists and other "liberal-minded" entities;
- dislike of the United Nations and having U.S. forces under foreign control;
- idea of "creeping socialism" in this country;
- racial/ethnic diversity undermines economic stability;
- federal government trampling on citizens rights, specifically gun rights and protection of property. ⁵

In inner cities throughout the United States, military recruiters are battling with street gangs over the membership of the youth of America. Our young people are looking to belong, to be embraced within a family, to feel a sense of unity. The difficulty in winning the battle for America's youth meets its most severe challenge not in the recruiter's office but after we secure that young person in the military family and then fail

to imbue in them the pride and purpose of serving this country. The lure of extremist and supremacist ideals replaces that sense of purpose and unity.

Disillusionment in the ideals of this country seems to be an overriding factor in the dynamics of why individuals join extremist groups. Take an individual like Timothy McVeigh, a U.S. Army tank gunner described by his platoon commander as "about as good a soldier as you get....you gave him a mission, and he got it done." Fellow soldiers recognized McVeigh as the perfect soldier claiming their commanding officer would prefer to have 200 McVeighs in their company.⁶ McVeigh was an atypical soldier, yet he did not raise any suspicions from his commanders simply because he performed his military assignment so well. What turns a "good" soldier like McVeigh around? By his own admission, it was only after he failed in his dream to become a Special Forces Commando that he became increasingly disillusioned with the military, resentful toward the government and preoccupied with conspiracy thoughts. Despite his plea of innocence in the Oklahoma City bombing of the Federal Building, it was McVeigh's alleged affiliation with a militia group in Michigan that focused national attention on his role and the involvement of extremist militia groups in the bombing.⁷

Where are the flaws in the system that allow extremists and supremacists to exist in the military? Prior involvement in extremist or hate groups can go virtually undetected as an individual makes application for the service. During entrance processing for the military, routine police checks are sought only if an applicant self admits to criminal activity or is suspected of criminal activity. Juvenile records are usually sealed and local

authorities have the authority to refuse disclosing information at their discretion as a matter of policy. Standard security questionnaires ask applicants if they have ever been affiliated with organizations dedicated to the overthrow of the U.S. Government.⁸ In regard to applicants' ties to extremist or supremacist groups, there is no method of challenging an applicant's statements nor is there any reason to.

In the recruiting district encompassing the greater New York metropolitan area, nearly 50 of the 180 new contracts written each month on recruits coming into the Navy are individuals who hold a "green card" and are not citizens of the United States.⁹ In large cities with considerable populations of diverse ethnic and foreign national groups, recruitment of non-U.S. citizens is common and relied upon to make up the numbers of recruits needed to man the ships and squadrons and units of the armed forces. By taking in these numbers of foreign nationals, are we setting ourselves up for dissension in the ranks? Are we manning a military with individuals who may have an agenda that is different from the stated mission of our military?

The problem does not lie in the recruitment process, per se. It is easy to change the process and increase scrutiny of an individual's background or curtail recruitment of foreign nationals. But how many individuals have been arrested for membership in an extremist group? How many foreign nationals can be traced back to extremist groups within their native countries? The real challenge is to identify members of extremist or supremacist groups once they are in the military which is the responsibility of the operational commander.

According to task force results, operational commanders on the whole claim to have no problem rooting out and disciplining known participants in extremist or supremacist groups. Of 253 brigade and battalion-level commanders interviewed by the Army task force, the vast majority view any participation with extremist groups or any type of extremist behavior as totally incompatible with military service. Senior Army leaders felt the regulation covering extremist activities gives them adequate guidelines on what constitutes an extremist organization and the administrative steps to be taken to correct a soldier's behavior before judicial action has to be taken.¹⁰

The chief complaint among senior and junior leaders, in other services as well as the Army, is that the rights of military members to join extremist or supremacist groups is unclear. A Defense Department regulation, DoD Directive 1325.6, bars "active participation," yet is muddy about what may be considered "passive participation."

*"Military personnel must reject participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes; attempt to create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin; or advocate the use of force or violence, or otherwise engage in efforts, to deprive individuals of their civil rights. Active participation, such as publicly demonstrating or rallying, fund raising, recruiting and training members, and organizing or leading such organizations is incompatible with Military Service, and is therefore prohibited. Commanders have the authority to employ the full range of administrative procedures, including separation or appropriate disciplinary action, against military personnel who actively participate in such groups"*¹¹

There is no known article in the Uniform Code of Military Justice that specifically relates to these activities, even though disloyal statements about the United States and conduct unbecoming are punishable under the general article. In a series of articles published in the Air Force and Army Times early in 1996, the problem of hate in the military was examined with disheartening results.¹²

Just after the killing of two African-Americans in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in depth investigations were conducted at Fort Bragg to determine how prevalent hate crimes and extremist activities are at that base. Media reports suggested that a command climate existed in the 82nd Division that tolerated extremism within the ranks.¹³ When one soldier was identified by the Criminal Investigation Command (CID) as a "skinhead," his battalion commander gave him a counseling statement and told him to stop all activities. When other soldiers began to be identified, a newly reporting battalion commander took firm administrative action and began discharge proceedings. Despite allegations that racist behavior was evident before the slayings, the senior leadership of the 82nd claimed there were no outward manifestations of extremist behavior in the ranks.¹⁴ How could this behavior go undetected?

The rules and regulations may be cloudy but the responsibility of the leadership is crystal clear: *know your troops*. While the military services have opted for quality of life over good order and discipline, the operational commander has lost sight of the most fundamental principle of good leadership: know your unit's mental attitude; keep in touch with their thoughts; see the members of your unit and let them see you so that they will know you and believe you know them. It is impossible for a good leader not to know

whether a member of his or her squadron or platoon or ship is involved in activities that are detrimental to the good of the unit. Extremist and hate group behaviors cannot be hidden from the entire unit. And if the unit is compromised, that commander is not a good leader.

The Army Task Force highlighted several areas of concern for military leaders to bear in mind.

- Shifting Demographics -- the Army (and other services no doubt) is suffering from a decrease in minority presence in combat units. In addition, lack of minority representation is more pronounced within Special Operations communities.
- Operational Pace -- high operational tempo -- the increased amount of time a soldier or sailor is away from the base, unit or home creates a stressful environment. This high pace limits the time and resources the commander has to conduct training and deal with sensitive issues. The unit or crew often takes this to mean that training is not important. Junior leaders are not afforded the time or training to deal with emerging problems or learn skills to recognize warning signs within the unit. In this scenario, the troubled member with a bent toward extremism can go undetected and uncorrected.
- Zero-Defect Environment -- with downsizing, base closures, and increased contingency operations, the military mindset has migrated into thinking no mistakes will be tolerated, no opportunity to recover exists and there is a demand for perfection. In this environment, subordinates may insulate the commander from

problems within the unit, fearing unwanted criticism for failure to deal effectively with problems within the chain of command.¹⁵

Placing responsibility upon leaders at the operational level is merely half the job. Unless this country has a strategic plan for preventive deterrence and engagement against extremist groups, the United States is at risk from a national threat, not just a foreign threat. The U.S. National Security Strategy of peacetime engagement, deterrence and conflict prevention, and fighting and winning our Nation's wars has been carved out to deal with global and regional threats from other nations.¹⁶ There exists a comprehensive Foreign Internal Defense (FID) program which, together with the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP), gives guidance and resources to commanders to develop operational plans for regional contingencies.¹⁷ This needs to be further developed to include a *National Internal Defense (NID)* program which addresses contingencies within the United States against *domestic* enemies. It is no longer realistic to depend on the National Guard or local police forces to deal with domestic crises.

The Secretary of Defense has tasked the Secretary of the Army to plan for, and commit resources in response to requests from civil authorities for military support in domestic *noncombatant* operations. The Director of Military Support (DOMS) tasks the Commanders in Chief, services and defense agencies to provide forces, and commitment of these forces is coordinated via the Joint Staff.¹⁸ The Joint Staff, with direction from the Secretary of Defense needs to develop a Crisis Management Process for internal defense in the event the federal government comes under attack from extremist or militia groups and have a Deliberate Planning package on the shelf to activate and draw from in

times of crisis.¹⁹ The lead player in this process must be U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). If the United States is faced with an “insurgency” type threat from extremists, forces that specialize in unconventional warfare and surveillance and reconnaissance, along with counterterrorism will have to be employed.

Suppose Captain Button’s plan was to fly his A-10 out of formation and land on a remote airfield or along a deserted stretch of highway under the cover of radar. His aircraft is equipped with air to ground munitions, Maverick and MK82/84 bombs, a 30MM gun, heat seeking missiles and the maneuverability to fly undetected if his Radar Warning Receiver is accurately tracking existing radar. This one aircraft can do some considerable damage to significant targets before being detected and destroyed.²⁰ If Craig Button was affiliated with an extremist group and planned to steal his A-10 to join with a militia in an attempt to disrupt or destroy the federal government, there really is no way to stop him. If he and two other pilots from his squadron or another squadron with similar or different aircraft coordinated an effort to steal and supply the militia with weaponry and platforms, the United States would be facing an enemy that must be taken seriously.

Timothy McVeigh, the model soldier, the Army’s “Top Gun”, is currently on trial for blowing up a federal building. McVeigh has been connected to a militia group by attending meetings and having literature in his possession. His army buddy and possible accomplice, Michael Fortier, testified at the trial that McVeigh told him the government was the enemy. “He and (Terry) Nichols wanted to blow up a building to avenge Waco...to cause a general uprising in America,” claimed Fortier. “The occupants of the

(Murrah) building were storm troopers to him, from Star Wars...a part of the evil empire,” Fortier went on to say.²¹ Are McVeigh’s alleged statements the rantings of a mad man or a good soldier with a grudge against the government? Is the U.S. military prepared to deal with 87,000 “good soldiers” with a collective grudge against the government?

The following are little known yet disturbing facts about extremist group movements:

- 40 out of 50 of the United States have organized and active militia groups, some states have up to 20 separate militia groups with membership reaching upwards of 15,000 members;
- Many groups openly express the conviction that impending conflict with the Federal government necessitates paramilitary training and stockpiling of weapons;
- Many militia supporters believe that a conspiracy exists, not only involving the Federal government but the United Nations, foreign troops and other “sinister” forces;
- Some militia groups believe the Federal government masterminded the Oklahoma City bombing of the federal building to discredit militia groups and create an excuse for further depriving citizens of their constitutional rights;

- Georgia, Idaho and Iowa have prominent military combat veterans serving as leadership of their militia groups; a New Hampshire group claims to be “better armed than the Army;”
- South Carolina actively recruits pilots and those with military skills and a large cadre of former Rangers, SEALs, and Green Berets make up the North Texas Constitutional Militia.²²

There are those who believe militia groups have diminished in strength since the Oklahoma City bombing; that they may have been driven underground. A military sociologist at the University of Maryland, David Segal, contends that despite the conservative nature of military members, extremism in the military is less prevalent than in the same age and social groups in American society. Gregory Walker, a former Green Beret who has written extensively on the subject of extremist groups, contends that there are extremists and supremacists scattered throughout the military just as they are scattered throughout General Motors. He believes the average service person just doesn't have the time nor the energy to do anything other than their assigned job, especially those 90% or so that are careerists.²³

A predominant factor in looking at extremism in the military centers around the all-volunteer force. Without a draft in effect, the military tends to be made up of a more conservative, narrower segment of the population. Lawrence Korb, former Assistant Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan, indicates that volunteers serve longer terms, reenlist in greater numbers and have lower turnover rates. He further contends that the

conservative tendencies of those who join are reinforced in the military and young soldiers become easy prey to extreme right wing groups.²⁴

The military is a subset of society. Soldiers, sailors and marines deal with the same issues as their civilian counterparts; personal freedom, disillusion with political leaders, and fear of losing identity in a diverse, multi-cultural society. There are times when the service member must put aside personal beliefs in order to carry out a mission. The operational commander must be one hundred percent sure of his or her troops, especially when carrying out that mission. Extremism in the ranks cannot be tolerated and the challenge in preventing and eliminating extremism may be monumental one day.

The solution lies in a four prong approach to be carried out from the top echelon down through the ranks from the operational commander to junior leaders:

- Initiate a Deliberate Planning Process to assist in Crisis Management for internal defense with USSOCOM as the lead agency;
- Exercise hyper vigilance in the recruitment process to screen potential extremist or supremacist leaning individuals;
- Develop and conduct a vigorous education program at the unit level to reinforce the core values of courage, commitment, honor, duty and country as well as dignity and respect;
- Redefine leadership concepts to instill the importance of knowing the troops and the moral make-up of the unit.

The threat of militia and other extremist groups rising up and mounting an insurgency or revolution against the U.S. Government is real and must be taken seriously. The concept that members of the military may break ranks and join these groups presents some urgent concerns. If the military is charged with defending this nation against an insurgency of its own people, where will our troops fall out in that war? There is a real possibility that National Guard troops, who are often attracted to paramilitary organizations, may line up on the side of the militia group who owns their allegiance. The dilemma that faces our military leadership involves identifying the threat within our own borders, developing an operational concept which will effectively deal with the challenge and ensuring our troops will fight on the right side.

¹ Patrick O'Driscoll, "Answers elusive in saga of missing pilot", USA TODAY, April 10, 1997, 3A.

² James Brooke, "Edgy Denver Is Bracing For Chance Of a Threat", The New York Times, April 19, 1997.

³ U.S. Department of the Army, "The Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activity-Defending American Values", (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), i.

⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Sir Walter Scott, Jr., United States Army, "The Recruitment Practices of Extremist Groups", U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 12 April 1996, 8.

⁶ Jonathan Franklin, "The Good Soldier", SPIN Magazine, Volume 13, Number 1, April 1997, 138-139.

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- ⁷ Ibid., 162.
- ⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, 27.
- ⁹ PNC (SW) Albert Dagraca, Navy Recruiting Processing Supervisor, Military Entrance Processing Station, Brooklyn, New York, phone interview, 7 May 1997.
- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, 10-11.
- ¹¹ Ibid., B-1.
- ¹² Patrick Paxton, "The Inside Story - Hate In The Military", Air Force Times, April 15, 1997, 12.
- ¹³ Regina Galvin, "Hate In The Army", Army Times, March 25, 1997, 12.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 13.
- ¹⁵ U.S. Secretary of the Army, 15-16.
- ¹⁶ Joint Military Operations Department, "National Military Strategy of the United States of America February 1995", The United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, 6.
- ¹⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Pub 3-07.1, Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense (FID)", Washington, DC, 26 June 1996, III-1-III-3.
- ¹⁸ Operations Directorate, The Joint Staff, "Crisis Action Procedures (Draft)", Washington, DC, 20 September 1995, pg. unnumbered.
- ¹⁹ Joint Chiefs Of Staff, "Joint Pub 5-0, Doctrine For Planning Joint Operations", Washington, DC, 13 April 1995, ix.
- ²⁰ Colonel (Select) Jeffrey S. Gordon, United States Air Force, interview, 8 May 1997.
- ²¹ Dean Reynolds, ABC World News Tonight, television newscast, May 12, 1997.
- ²² Thomas Halpern, David Rosenberg, and Irwin Suall, "Militia Movement: Prescription For Disaster", USA Today, vol. 124, January 1996, 17-22.
- ²³ Patrick Paxton, "Experts debate scope of hate in military", Army Times, April 1, 1996, 14-15.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 15.

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